

Ellinwood girls looking to carry on momentum from big finish

By Mike Courson

It's no secret: Andrew Cherry had a rough start as the Lady Eagle basketball coach in Ellinwood. Coming off a historic season, Ellinwood was hit hard by graduation in 2015 and went just 3-18 in Cherry's first season. The Lady Eagles lost their first 10 games of the 2016-17 season before finishing strong with wins in eight of the last 12 games. That run included a take down of ranked Kiowa County in Greensburg.

So the bar has been set for the 2017-18 Lady Eagles: begin the season strong and finish that way.

"We are excited about the opportunity to grow on our success from last season, but with a big group of new players, we are really hoping to have success that will get us very excited about the future of Lady Eagle basketball," Cherry said. "Our kids have worked really hard and have been excited about working and playing together so I hope we can just continue to build our program."

Cherry returns four varsity players but loses some key varsity experience. Allison Panning returned for a senior campaign to lead the team in scoring and rebounding last year. Brittney Beck was a multi-year outside threat for the Lady Eagles who averaged 10 points a night. Maddie Hayes and



2017-18 Ellinwood Lady Eagle basketball team, front row from left: Lauren Petz, Skyler Harrington, Maria Santos, Jennie Magnier, Anahi Mendez, and Ashtin Klepper. Back row: Asst. Coach Alex Birney, Mya Maxwell, Becca Henderson, Erin Hammeke, Maddy Ward, Kennedy Harrington, Marie Maestas, Colleen Donnaway, Mgr. Teagan Torrez, and Coach Andrew Cherry. Not pictured: Katie Birzer (mgr.). (photo courtesy of EHS)

Hunter Miller also saw serious varsity time.

Leading the returners is junior Maddy Ward. She developed into a strong post player last year, averaging 10.4 points and 3.1 rebounds a night. She finished the season strong last year with double-digits in nine of her last 13 games. She put up a season-high 20 points in the season-ending loss to Kinsley.

Sophomore Kennedy Harrington returns after starting several games as a freshman. She averaged two points a night but will have a bigger role this winter.

"Our returners are going to play a major part for our team this season," said Cherry. "Maddy and Kennedy Harrington were

both starters for me last year and did a great job and have really started to show their leadership this year as well. It is great to see the growth in both of them in practice and I hope that carries over to game time.

"Maddy will have a great chance to be a first-team all-league player and be on the verge of being an all-state player this season. She is stronger and quicker than she has been and she is continuing to look for her chances to make her teammates better as well. She is a tough kid and it will be fun to see what she can do.

"Kennedy will just continue to get better. She plays so hard on both sides of the floor. She is quick defensively and she

is a great passer and rebounder on the offensive end. I am excited to see how she is going to grow."

Junior Lauren Petz and sophomore Kaitlyn Panning each played in 20 varsity games last year, combining for two points a night. Both have picked up varsity experience since then, playing in the state softball championship last spring.

"Lauren will also make a major difference for us this season," said Cherry. "She is super quick and will make an impact defensively for us by being able to guard any guard that we need her too. She has also developed her passing and will hopefully help us move the ball effectively on offense."

Cherry will also have some freshmen on the floor all winter. Mya Maxwell was the volleyball team's setter already this fall, and Ashtin Klepper earned all-state honors for Cherry on the cross country course.

"Both players have the ability to defend different positions on the floor and both look to score whenever they can," Cherry said. "Both of them had success in middle school and they are looking to carry that over on the high school level. Mya was

the leading scorer on our middle school team the last couple of seasons and Ashtin loves to shoot the ball so I hope they will help us out offensively this season.

"We will have about 3-4 people come off the bench that will get significant varsity minutes this season."

In all, Cherry knows he has a young group, but this year's team has a nice foundation of experience and a thirst to build the program for future seasons.

"The girls that are there have been working their tails off and I just love to see their positive attitudes and great work ethic," he said. "We have had a great couple of weeks of practice and have really started to look pretty good. I am really excited to see what we are going to accomplish this season with this group."

The Lady Eagles can expect some early tests with Class 3A Russell tonight and a ranked St. John and Larned teams looming at the Keady Classic. After Christmas, Ellinwood runs into more ranked teams in St. John, Haven, Otis-Bison, and Central Plains.

Eagle basketball 2017-18

Dec. 1	@Russell
Dec. 4-9	@Keady Classic
Dec. 12	ELL-SALINE
Dec. 15	@Ellis
Jan. 9	@St. John
Jan. 13	MACKSVILLE
Jan. 15-20	@Hoisington Tourn.
Jan. 23	@Kinsley
Jan. 26	LYONS
Jan. 30	@Victoria
Feb. 2	@Haven
Feb. 6	NESS CITY
Feb. 13	PLAINVILLE
Feb. 16	OTIS-BISON
Feb. 20	@Central Plains
March 1-3	Sub-state TBA
March 7-10	State

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